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THE UNITED STATES AND THE SPANISH AMERICAN COLONIES. A REPLY.

BY THE HON. H. D. MONEY.

THE distinguished Mexican Minister, Señor Romero, in his interesting paper in the July number of *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, leaves a disagreeable impression on the mind of the American citizen, who has always gloried in the belief that his government had cordially sympathized with any people anywhere in their struggle for liberty, and especially with those of this continent. Señor Romero declares that the revolted Spanish colonies established their independence without aid from any outside source, and denies that the United States ever rendered them "material or moral assistance."

One of the complaints against the United States is their tardiness in recognizing the independence of the several colonies. In this age of the steamship, the railroad and the submarine cable, the time required for definite action on the part of the United States may seem to have been unnecessarily protracted, but an investigation into the conditions which prevailed at the time of the revolution will acquit our government of any undue delay. It must be remembered, also, that the warning words of Washington in his farewell address, against foreign complications, were so recent as to have hardly lost their echo, and had, with other causes, induced an exceedingly conservative and cautious foreign policy. There were then no regular mail communications between the United States and the South American colonies, and very little commercial or social intercourse; and that was made hazardous by the swarms of privateers, who, on the South Atlantic and on the Spanish Main, flew the insurgent flags and committed the most atrocious acts of piracy.

The Spanish subjects in America did not originally conceive

the idea of independence from any particular love of it. For three centuries they had suffered tyranny, proscription, repression, cruelty from their sovereign lord of Spain, with a constancy which was more creditable to their patience than to their enterprise. In fact, with the exception of perhaps Cuba, Costa Rica, and Chili, the proportion of whites to Indians would not average one in twelve, with a considerable number of negroes in La Plata and Venezuela especially, who were unprepared and unfit for self-government.

The Indians, who were the victims of the Spanish—oppressed and oppressors—were, perhaps, indifferent to what they believed would be a mere change of masters, hoping for little benefit under any circumstances. The native whites were as much discriminated against, and almost as much oppressed, as the Indians and blacks. The Spaniards held the offices, civil and military. They were the merchants and capitalists, and controlled almost every business enterprise, this condition of things giving them a monopoly of position, wealth, and advantages which they did not care to submit to the fortunes of a revolution. Personally, they were thriving, and their interests committed them to the policy of *laissez faire*.

It may well be doubted whether the Spanish subjects in America were not forced into revolution more by the chaotic condition of affairs in Spain, which left them virtually to their own resources, than by any desire for independent government, or for the position of an autonomous dependency of Spain. It must be admitted, however, that the torch kindled at the altar of liberty in the British provinces was taking its luminous course, firing the hearts of the people in both the new and the old worlds, and its generous flame gave, no doubt, warmth to the efforts of the patriots of South America.

The status of the respective governments asserting their independence was difficult to be ascertained, and the United States sent special commissioners, carried by warships, to enquire into the true condition of the revolutionists. Before attempting by this means to inform themselves, the United States had very promptly proposed to Great Britain and France to unite in recognition of the independence of the new governments. Another fact that added to the uncertainty was the efforts being made by Peru, Chili, and La Plata to organize a confederate republic.

New Granada and Venezuela were coalescing into the republic of Colombia, and the Central American States into the republic of Central America, while, during the whole struggle, from Mexico to Patagonia, there was continual talk of alliances, offensive and defensive ; so that the United States might well hesitate before taking any action likely to prove offensive to a friendly power. It should be remembered that when, after due deliberation, the United States did recognize the Spanish-American governments in 1822, the act was made the subject by Spain of a grave and emphatic protest to the United States, and of a circular to the members of the Holy Alliance, invoking their assistance. In fact, her displeasure amounted to resentment, and caused her not only to demand explanations, but, also, to refuse to ratify a treaty already negotiated for the cession of Florida and the establishment of our Western boundary. In that negotiation the Spanish minister endeavored to obtain a pledge from the United States that they should not acknowledge the independence of these provinces. The United States would make no such pledge, even to her own profit ; and this is surely good evidence of a support, both "material and moral." It is quite probable that the cession was at last made by Spain for fear of the forcible occupation of the territory by the United States, which would have been a blow at her power in America and her prestige in Europe.

It is worthy of mention that the same desire to observe strictly the faith of treaties, and the obligations of friendly neutrality, which influenced the United States in the tardiness of this recognition, operated quite as distinctly in favor of Mexico, in postponing the recognition of the republic of Texas, which had driven every hostile Mexican from its shores, organized its government, and performed its functions and maintained a position becoming a member of the family of nations. For years the Texans impatiently awaited their recognition by the United States ; and notwithstanding the ardent sympathy of the people and the passage of repeated resolutions by each House of Congress promising support to the Executive, yet no action was taken, no resolution of Congress ever signed, until the last day of the official term of "Old Hickory." That ardent lover of liberty recognized the independence of Texas by sending a diplomatic representative to her. Still later, when the French and Austrian troops

had placed Maximilian on the throne of the Empire of Mexico, there was not only a slowness but an absolute failure to recognize his government; and his expulsion from Mexico was due as well to the decided and determined attitude of the United States as to the prowess of Mexican arms.

The United States have always recognized the *de facto* government, and were the first to recognize the imperial governments of Dom Pedro and Iturbide; and, notwithstanding the charge of cold indifference to the success of the Spanish-American revolutionists, they were the first to recognize the independence of these governments. Under the bonds of their treaty with Spain, they could not tolerate the fitting out of military expeditions in their ports; but the revolutionists and the Spaniards were equally permitted to purchase in her cities all kinds of material not contraband of war. Of this both availed themselves to the full extent, and the curious spectacle was afforded of two ships exactly alike, built at the same time, in the same American shipyard—one for the Spanish king, and one for his insurgent subjects. As far as the law of nations would permit, we certainly gave “material” support to the cause of freedom in South America.

We are also charged with withholding “moral” support. The answers to this are the repeated resolutions passed in Congress to aid the Executive in any constitutional effort he might make for the benefit of the colonists; and the interest and sympathy expressed through the press and other channels of publicity. In fact, it is inconceivable, not only from what we can learn from the history of those times, but from our knowledge of the American character and temper, that we should have occupied a coldly sympathetic attitude toward the struggling patriots of South America, and although President Monroe gave a most scrupulous regard to the observance of our treaty with Spain, and the maintenance of a friendly neutrality, yet he privately and officially repeatedly expressed, as did his cabinet and our most distinguished statesmen, his warm concern in the affairs of the revolutionists. In his message to Congress in 1822, President Monroe said that the movement in the Spanish provinces “attracted attention and excited the sympathy of our fellow-citizens from its commencement;” also that “to other claims a just sensibility has always been felt and frankly acknowledged, but they, in themselves, could never become an adequate cause of action.”

Mr. Monroe was still further embarrassed by the civil wars and dissensions that prevailed among the revolutionists themselves, and time was absolutely necessary, in some instances, to ascertain what party was entitled to recognition as the government.

It may be noted that when general recognition was accorded in 1822, but a short time had elapsed from the triumph of General San Martin at Lima, in September, 1821, which was, by the revolutionists themselves, considered the finishing stroke to Spanish authority, and as such celebrated with great rejoicing from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It is somewhat curious that a distinguished representative of Mexico should consider the declaration of the Monroe doctrine, in 1823, as of no "material" advantage to the new republics, and much more so that it was of no value as giving "moral" support. It certainly had much to do with arresting the movement designed by the Congresses of the Holy Alliance at Troppau, Laybach, Verona, and elsewhere, to reduce the revolting provinces anew to subjection to Ferdinand. Before Mr. Monroe had declared his famous "doctrine," the British Minister, George Canning, had informed the French Minister at London with great emphasis, that if the design of the Holy Alliance was persisted in, Great Britain would acknowledge the independence of the Spanish provinces. Great Britain decided to weaken Spain, so as to enjoy trade with her late colonies. This had been denied to her by the humane and gentle policy of Spain toward her American subjects, which inflicted death upon them as the penalty for the crime of trading with any other people than the Spaniards.

The motive which influenced the Executive of the United States was more disinterested, although not entirely unselfish. The Holy Alliance had most clearly avowed its belief that no reform in government could come through a revolt of subjects against the authority of kings, who ruled by divine right, and they had made equally clear their purpose to suppress any movement in derogation of that right. They had promptly acted upon that declaration by marching a hundred thousand of their troops into Spain and prostrating a constitutional Cortes at the feet of Ferdinand, and by suppressing the liberal movement in the Piedmont. They then proposed to continue their operations on the Western Hemisphere for the restoration of the Spanish authority. The United States had not at that time attained a

position among nations that so challenged the respect of Europe as to cause a quarrel with her to be considered a momentous matter, and they had a risk to run so grave that the Spanish republicans of America should appreciate it.

Señor Romero cites the historical fact that Mr. Clay, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, requested the ministers of Mexico and Colombia to suspend an expedition which their governments were jointly fitting out for the invasion of Cuba with a view to wresting that island from the Spanish Crown. The reasons given by Mr. Clay are not accepted as sincere by the Mexican Minister, who suggests that Mr. Clay feared that the conquest of the island by Colombia and Mexico would lead to the abolition of slavery thereon. This belief is based upon the hypothesis that the administration was being conducted in the interest of slavery in the United States. This administration had for its President John Quincy Adams, a New Englander of very great ability and accomplishments, hostile to the institution of slavery, and the first representative to introduce into Congress an abolition petition. Our citizens have been accustomed to consider Henry Clay as the highest type of frank and fearless American manhood ; and will not so lightly discredit his sincerity—even in an affair of diplomacy.

The reason mentioned as given by Henry Clay was not the only one which he avowed ; but in itself it constituted a sufficient motive for discouraging the proposed expedition. It was not believed that Colombia or Mexico, separately or jointly, without navies and without resources, would be able to hold the island against the adverse contention of either France or Great Britain. About this time, and a little after, it was believed that France was preparing a great fleet and army of invasion to capture Cuba ; and at one time there was a general report that possession of the island had been accomplished by her. Great Britain had been absorbing the Spanish possessions in the West Indies, and was exceedingly anxious to add to the list the “gem of the Antilles” ; so that the apprehensions of Mr. Clay were not only entirely reasonable, but warranted by the history of the times.

Mr. Clay doubted the capacity of the Cubans, on account of their small numbers, and the racial diversity of the population, to maintain their independence. However much the question of

slavery entered into our domestic and foreign policy, it is not easy to understand how the possession of Cuba by any power likely to get it would threaten the institution in America, or even in Cuba. Great Britain, lashed by the eloquence of Wilberforce, paid for and manumitted her slaves in 1838. France followed, a slow second, in 1848, and Mexico did not emancipate her own, of which she had very few, until several years after the events here considered.

There is no evidence that the inhabitants of Cuba had invited the invasion of Colombia and Mexico, nor that they desired to throw off the Spanish yoke. There was no outbreak there contemporaneous with the uprising in the other colonies in the hour of Spain's calamity and confusion at home. In fact, the Spanish crown, in grateful acknowledgment of the loyalty of the Cubans in these years of general rebellion, designated her "the ever-faithful isle." The invasion was projected, as far as we can learn, not through sympathy with the Cubans, but from a natural and proper desire of Colombia and Mexico to deprive their enemy of a convenient base of operations against them, present and future.

The other reason above-mentioned was a sincere desire on the part of the United States to terminate the long-protracted war between Spain and her colonies, which had not only exhausted all the combatants of their resources, but had subjected the commerce of the United States to the numerous pirates who conveniently sheltered themselves under the ensign of one or other of the republics. Mr. Clay was earnestly engaged in urging Russia to bring about a peace, and there seems to be no doubt that the action of Mr. Clay, regarded by Señor Romero as unfriendly, was really of the most vital service to Mexico and the other republics, as it made Spain feel the necessity of terminating the war with the colonies already gone from her, in order to secure Cuba and Puerto Rico that remained to her. It was Mr. Clay's business also to protect the material interests of his own country. Our trade with Havana was greater than with all the other Spanish possessions, and in view of its injury or destruction by an invasion Mr. Clay frankly declared to the ministers of Colombia and Mexico that the interests of the United States would not permit them to allow a desolating war to be carried on in Cuba.

If anyone derived from Señor Romero's paper the impression that the freedom of Cuba from Spanish oppression was thwarted by the interposition of the United States in this affair he may take comfort from the true reasons rendered above; and if the principles laid down by Mr. Clay as sufficient justification for his declaration of our policy at that time were applied by the administration of to-day there would be a prompt interference to stop a war not only desolating but destructive and exterminating. Great as was our business with Havana then, it was a bagatelle to the amount of our commerce with her at the beginning of the present Cuban struggle.

Shortly after the date of Mr. Clay's communication, just considered, the new minister from the republic of Central America declared the United States the "most generous friend" of the Spanish revolutionists.

H. D. MONEY.